



Michigan Autism Safety Training (MAST)

Law Enforcement, Fire and EMS Field Response Training



**Funding provided by the
Michigan Department of Community Health**

MCOLES Approved

Endorsed by: Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police

AAoM Autism Safety Training



Objectives

Law Enforcement, Fire and EMS Professionals will:

- ❑ Expand their knowledge of autism and autism behaviors
- ❑ Increase recognition skills of persons with autism
- ❑ Acquire information and tips on how to safely and effectively interact with individuals with autism and their family/care providers
- ❑ Learn community outreach strategies in increase safety and support of those with autism



Autism Facts



Research indicates that people who have developmental disabilities, including autism, have up to **SEVEN TIMES** more contact with law enforcement than a member of the general public (Curry et. al, 1993).



Autism: On Duty Situations



- ❑ Check Subject
- ❑ Wandering/Missing Person
- ❑ Intruder
- ❑ Out of Control
- ❑ Victimization
- ❑ Detective Bureau
- ❑ Response to Emergencies



- vehicle accidents, structure fires, medical emergencies



On Duty Situation Risks & Behaviors



- ❑ **May not recognize authority figures or know what is expected of them**
- ❑ **Basic verbal and non-verbal communication challenges**
- ❑ **Echoing instructions and/or questions**
- ❑ **Exhibit behaviors that draw attention**
- ❑ **Misinterpretation of behaviors**
- ❑ **Misleading indicators of guilt such as lack of eye contact, aloof, or indifferent manner; may change topic**



On Duty Situation Risks & Behaviors



- ❑ Lack fear of real danger
- ❑ High tolerance of pain
- ❑ Sensory issues that may produce fight or flight reaction
- ❑ Hypotonia: low muscle tone
- ❑ Mechanical or positional asphyxia will require alternate restraint options and techniques



Response Strategies



- ❑ Approach in quiet and non-threatening manner
- ❑ Assure person is unarmed and check for injuries
- ❑ Avoid touching individual
- ❑ Look for medical tag or identification
- ❑ Speak calmly



Response Strategies



- ❑ Use simple and direct instructions: “stand up”, “go to the car”
- ❑ Allow for delayed response time
- ❑ May need to repeat and/or rephrase
- ❑ Additional units to arrive without lights and sirens if not emergency
- ❑ Model calm body language and give extra personal space





Response Strategies

- ❑ Give praise and encouragement
- ❑ Use pictures, written phrases, and commands
- ❑ Use low gestures for attention; avoid rapid pointing or waving



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



De-escalate Behaviors at the Scene

- ❑ May not respond well to uniform emergency responders or change in routine
- ❑ Responders should not interpret failure to respond as lack of cooperation
- ❑ Seek assistance from family/care provider
- ❑ Avoid stopping repetitive behavior unless there is risk to you/others
- ❑ May need to remove canine partners, sirens, lights, crowds



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



De-escalate Behaviors at the Scene

- ❑ Evaluate for injury; may not ask for help or show pain
- ❑ Be aware they may have a seizure – 40% of this population has some form of seizure disorder
- ❑ Wait for behavior to calm/de-escalate, stay in geographic area, remove items to keep area safe and keep at a safe distance
- ❑ Remain alert to the possibility of outbursts or impulsive acts
- ❑ Pepper spray may heighten sensory reaction and escalate behavior



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



Precautions with Restraint

- ❑ Avoid positional asphyxia – turn person on side to allow normal breathing (due to under-developed trunk muscles-hypotonia-may not support his/her airway)
- ❑ The person may not recognize the futility of resistance and continue to struggle. Continue to use communication, de-escalation, and calming response techniques
- ❑ For responders' safety, avoid standing too close or behind. The person may suddenly lurch backwards or forward

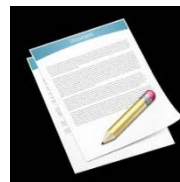


Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



During Custody and Arrest

- ❑ Document autism in your initial report
- ❑ Alert jail supervisor, prosecutor and mental health professional for immediate evaluation
- ❑ Alert jail authorities and suggest an isolation facility. A person with autism would be at extreme risk in the general prison population (Do we really want them in jail?)
- ❑ Contact parents/caregivers for information regarding care and communication with the person



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



Emergency Room Tips

- ❑ Avoid making patient wait
- ❑ Require exam room and do not leave alone
- ❑ Give patient time to calm down
- ❑ Minimize lights, noise, radios and unnecessary personnel
- ❑ Advise security



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



Emergency Services Required Reporting

- ❑ Talk to caregiver/case manager before reporting abuse
- ❑ Mattress only-wedge head between wall and frame for sensory need.
- ❑ No furniture
- ❑ No sheets, blankets or pillows
- ❑ No curtains/decorations (destructive behavior/Pica)



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



Interviewing a Person with Autism

- ❑ The person with autism may be a victim, witness or a suspect
- ❑ Plan for your interview
- ❑ You can overcome communication barriers during interviews when you learn the communication style and background
- ❑ Review records and talk to people who know him/her- parents, teachers and caregivers



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



Interviewing a Person with Autism

- ❑ Get to know the person's communication style through casual conversation before any attempt before getting recollection of an event
- ❑ Develop a good rapport – use first name
- ❑ Use simple and direct language
- ❑ Assure the same meaning to the words being used in the interview



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



Interviewing a Person with Autism

- ❑ Assure you and the person being interviewed understand who is being referred to when using pronouns
- ❑ Seek permission to and consider recording the interview
- ❑ Consider having someone he/she trusts in the interview
- ❑ Plan questioning based on person's ability level
- ❑ Deal with one issue at a time



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



The Interview

- ❑ Have the victim recreate the context in his/her own words
 - Ask questions that require a narrative
- ❑ Plan for this interview to be longer than usual and you may have to plan to interview the person more than once
- ❑ Be alert to non-verbal cues that suggest the victim does not understand, is confused, or does not agree with the question you asked or the statements made to him/her (restlessness, frowning, and extremely long pauses)
- ❑ Use visuals (pictures) if needed



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



The Interview

- ❑ The victim may not want to answer questions more than once – explain first that you may have to ask questions more than once
- ❑ You may have to avoid uniforms and authority clothing depending on the person's reaction
- ❑ Let the victim know that it is okay to say “no” to a question
- ❑ Avoid leading questions



Autism: Techniques to Reduce Liability



The Interview

- ❑ Learn person's schedule and determine events through this context, rather than asking "what time did it happen"
- ❑ Common to have short attention span; consider several short interviews
- ❑ Be alert to a spontaneous disclosure of evidence





Autism Safety

Video and Discussion



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Increasing Autism Safety in the Community



Community Outreach

- ❑ Visit schools, businesses, recreational facilities, and homes where there are people with autism
- ❑ For responders/community safety and to reduce liability, create opportunities to meet people who have autism, their families, and support organizations
- ❑ Responders and persons with autism can learn from each other during these controlled, safe and non-stressful interactions



Increasing Autism Safety in the Community



Autism Emergency & Behavior Response School and Home Safety Plan

3 Forms

- Autism Profile and Emergency Contact
- Emergency Situation and Annual Drills
- Common Behaviors and Responses



Increasing Autism Safety in the Community



- ❑ Encourage families to have emergency plans and packets for home, school, and transportation
- ❑ Have families enter information of family member with autism in 911 data base
- ❑ Use the reverse 911
- ❑ Promote autism awareness stickers and decals for home and vehicles
- ❑ Have annual autism training
- ❑ Refer families to the Mid Michigan Autism Association (MMAA)/local network



Techniques to Reduce Liability



These are the best approaches to ensure emergency responder and citizen safety, make the best use of your valuable time and resources, and avoid litigation.



Autism and Responders: Final Thoughts



- ❑ Relax and role model behavior.
- ❑ Speak in short, direct calm words.
- ❑ Be patient – refer to autism card.
- ❑ Ask for assistance from someone who knows the person.
- ❑ Get to know the families with autism.
- ❑ Promote registering in the 911 database.
- ❑ Continue education - roll call video, staff, partners and community.



Autism Resources



- ❑ Autism Alliance of Michigan
www.autismallianceofmichigan.org
- ❑ Autism Risk & Safety Management:
<http://www.autismriskmanagement.com/>
- ❑ MMAA Emergency Response: “Autism Safety - Be Informed Be Prepared”:
<https://sites.google.com/site/emergresptest/>



Thank you – You are important to families, communities and Michigan!



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